

Summer exam entries for GCSEs, Level 1/2 certificates, AS and A levels: provisional figures April 2017

Background information accompanying the
statistical release



15 June 2017

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Information about the statistics

Purpose

This release presents figures on the number of entries for GCSEs, Level 1/2 certificates (commonly known as international GCSEs), AS and A levels submitted to exam boards for the exams being sat in summer 2017. These figures are provisional and they represent the number of entries submitted by schools and colleges to exam boards by 19 April 2017.

Geographical coverage

The report presents data on the number of entries in England for GCSEs, AS and A levels for the summer 2017 exam series.

However, the data tables accompanying this release also include entry figures for Wales and Northern Ireland.

Description

This release shows the number of entries broken down by subject, country and age of students based on school year groups.

Centres enter students at qualification level ahead of the summer examination series according to the course of study that they have followed.

JCQ assign a code to every qualification according to a category defined by JCQ which groups qualifications in subject groups. We use the JCQ groupings to filter and sort the data in the data tables.

The accompanying data sheets also include the entries for Level 1/2 certificates. Although these are not discussed in the report, they are included in the data tables for reference.

External Influences (England)

There are various factors which might have influenced the entries for GCSE, Level 1/2 certificates, AS and A levels given in this release:

AS and A level

- In reformed qualifications (from 2016), AS and A level have been decoupled. This means that AS results don't count towards a student's A level as they did previously. This may mean fewer entries for AS in reformed A level subjects.
- Changes in post-16 funding may result in a change in the number of AS entries.
- Phase 1 reform subjects were introduced last year, mainly comprising facilitating subjects and some large entry subjects. Facilitating subjects are those subjects recognised by universities as providing the broadest scope of options for university applicants. These include English, mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, classical subjects, French, German, Spanish, history and geography. A further 11 reformed subjects were available for the first time in 2017¹.

GCSE and Level 1/2 certificates

- In 2017 the first reformed GCSEs are available in three subjects: English language, English literature and mathematics. These GCSEs are graded on a 9 to 1 scale (9 denoting the highest passing grade and 1 denoting the lowest passing grade). In 2018, new reformed GCSEs become available. For more information on phases of the GCSE reform [click here](#); for information on the grading [click here](#).
- From 2017, Level 1/2 certificates in English language, English literature and mathematics will not count in school performance tables and therefore there may be a fall in the entries for these qualifications and a shift in the cohort back to GCSEs.
- Since September 2013, only a student's first entry to a GCSE qualification counts in their school's performance tables. Since 2014, this has been associated with an overall fall in the number of early entries from students in Year 10 and below.

¹ For more information on the reform timetable please see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform/get-the-facts-as-and-a-level-reform>

- The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is a school performance measure relating to attainment in core academic subjects. In 2017 the measure will look at how many students get a grade 5 or above in the reformed English and mathematics GCSEs and a grade C or above in history or geography, a specified combination of science GCSEs and a language.²

- In 2016, the Progress 8 measure was introduced to schools. It is a key school accountability measure that is based on students' progress from Key Stage 2 in eight GCSE subjects. In 2017, Progress 8 is made up of four elements³:
 1. A double weighted mathematics element.
 2. A double weighted English element based on the highest point score in English language or English literature qualification.
 3. An element which includes the three highest point scores from EBacc qualifications.
 4. An element including three qualifications from the remaining EBacc subjects and/or other GCSEs or other qualifications included on the DfE approved list for performance tables.

- Since August 2015 full time students who have not achieved a grade C (and from 2017 a grade 4) or above in English and mathematics in GCSE or a Level 1/2 certificate must continue studying these subjects in order to be funded post 16.

External influences (Wales and Northern Ireland)

The policy contexts in Wales and Northern Ireland are different from England in a number of ways. For example, the governments of Wales and Northern Ireland have retained the unitised structure in some GCSEs as well as grades A* to G, and schools and colleges in Wales and Northern Ireland are still be able to enter students for exams in the winter exam series in some subjects; in Wales and Northern Ireland, reformed AS qualifications contribute 40% of the total marks of the full A level.⁴

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-eligible-qualifications>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-8-school-performance-measure>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-and-a-level-differences-in-england-wales-and-northern-ireland>

Data source

Data have been collected at an appropriate point when entries are reasonably complete, in this case, by 19 April 2017⁵. However, schools can continue to make late entries right up to the day of the exam, so the total entry numbers will change almost on a daily basis. Ofqual agreed these dates with the exam boards as the date when the majority of entries would have been submitted. We collect the data at the same point each year to aid year-on-year comparisons.

The data tables accompanying this release for England, Wales and Northern Ireland differ in that in Northern Ireland students sit GCSEs and Level 1/2 certificates (commonly known as international GCSEs) in Year 12 and A levels in Year 14. In England and Wales, these are Year 11 and 13, respectively. In addition, the point at which a student begins their education in Northern Ireland depends on their age at 1 July, whereas in England and Wales, it is 1 September. Therefore, entries were collected for each year group based on age at 30 June 2017 for Northern Ireland and 31 August 2017 for England and Wales.

Limitations

There is potential for error in the information provided by exam boards, therefore Ofqual cannot guarantee that the information received is correct. However, Ofqual conducts various quality assurance checks outlined below.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance procedures are carried out as explained in the Quality Assurance Framework for Statistical Publications published by Ofqual⁶ to ensure the accuracy of the data and to challenge or question it, where necessary. Ofqual continuously manages this process by:

- ensuring that data providers are clear about what is required of them – a process helped by ensuring that providers are fully consulted during the initial design phase and for any subsequent change;
- reminding all providers (if appropriate) that, as a condition of them being regulated, all data must be completely accurate;
- being alert to unexpected changes in the data submitted by comparing individual returns over time from the same provider;
- actively challenging any unexpected results with the data providers; and

⁵ Data on entry by tier for GCSE mathematics specifications was collected at a slightly different date.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-statistics-policies-and-procedures>

- having a proportionate data-auditing framework in place, allowing for auditing of providers' information collection, collation and delivery processes as necessary, using a wide range of tools from questionnaires to on-site process audits.

Publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

Revisions

Once published, data on the number of provisional entries as at 19 April 2017 are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or to correct an error. In some cases, data may be amended to reflect any new categorisation of subjects.

Confidentiality and rounding

In accordance with Ofqual's rounding policy, all figures for the number of entries are rounded. In the commentary, they are rounded to the nearest 50 to aid understanding. In the accompanying data tables, the figures are rounded to the nearest 10. This is to ensure the data does not reveal an individual student.

Status

These statistics are classified as official statistics. They are of particular interest to Ofqual, recognised exam boards and the Department for Education. Ofqual uses these statistics to inform understanding of entry patterns on awarding outcomes.

Definitions

A levels

Also known as General Certificates of Education (GCE), the A level is an academic qualification offered by educational bodies in the UK to students completing secondary or pre-university education. At present, a combination of legacy and reformed A levels are available to students. A levels are generally (but not exclusively) sat by 18-year-olds in schools and colleges but are open to anyone who wants to gain a qualification.

For legacy A levels, the qualification is generally studied over a two year period and split into two parts, one part studied in each year. The first part is known as the Advanced Subsidiary (AS)⁷. The second part is known as A2. The AS is a

⁷ Previously known as the Advanced Supplementary, with the same abbreviation.

qualification in its own right, and the AS combined with A2 forms the complete A level qualification.

For reformed A levels, the results of the AS qualification do not count towards a student's final A level grade. As such, there is no requirement for students to enter the AS qualification in a given subject, even if they intend to study the full A level. The first reformed A levels in 13 subjects will be awarded in 2017⁸. Reformed AS qualifications were available for the first time in 2016 in 13 subjects.⁹ A further 11 reformed subjects were available for the first time in 2017. For more information on the reform timetable see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform/get-the-facts-as-and-a-level-reform>.

Awarding organisation

An awarding organisation is recognised by the qualifications regulators in England, Wales and/or Northern Ireland to develop, deliver and award qualifications. Awarding organisations are also referred to as exam boards in the context of GCSEs and A levels.

Cash in

Schools and colleges enter students who are completing a qualification with exam boards.

Certificate/certification

A formal acknowledgement of a student's achievement.

GCSEs

General Certificates of Secondary Education are the main school-leaving qualification in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are available in a range of subjects and can be studied alongside other qualifications. They are generally (but not exclusively) sat by 16-year-olds in schools and colleges, but are open to anyone who wants to gain a qualification.

⁸ 2017 reformed AS levels ancient languages (classical Greek, Latin), dance, drama and theatre, geography, modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish), music, physical education religious studies.

⁹ 2016 reformed AS levels: Art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computing, economics, English language, English language and literature, English literature, history, physics, psychology, sociology.

Level 1/2 certificates

These are qualifications with some similarities to GCSE qualifications with similar teaching time and similar content. A number of these are commonly known as international GCSEs and some subjects are currently included as such in the Department for Education school performance tables in England. However, as the reformed GCSEs are introduced, Level 1/2 certificates in equivalent subjects will no longer be included in the performance tables – this means that Level 1/2 certificates in English/English language and maths are not included this year.

Year 10

The cohort of students who will become 15 years old by the end of the academic year.

Year 11

The cohort of students who will become 16 years old by the end of the academic year.

Year 12

The cohort of students who will become 17 years old by the end of the academic year.

Year 13

The cohort of students who will become 18 years old by the end of the academic year.

Statistical policies

The policies and procedures that Ofqual follow for production and release of its statistical releases are available [here](#).

Useful links

The report and data tables accompanying this release are available [here](#).

Feedback

We welcome your feedback on our publications. Should you have any comments on this statistical release and how to improve it to meet your needs please contact us as statistics@ofqual.gov.uk.

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us at publications@ofqual.gov.uk if you have any specific accessibility requirements.



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